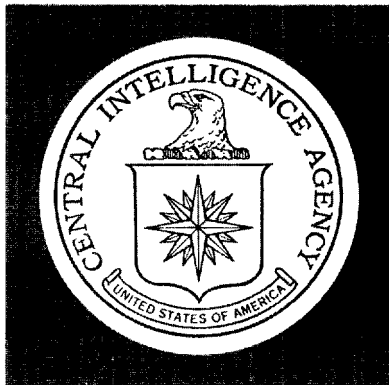


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

*Expansion of Construction Activity
in Northwest North Vietnam*

NGA review(s) completed.

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MARCH 1967

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FOREWORD

This memorandum discusses road construction and newly identified facilities in northwest North Vietnam near the border with Communist China. It updates information contained in a CIA report published in October 1966 which discussed similar activity observed during [REDACTED]

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EXPANSION OF CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITY
IN NORTHWEST NORTH VIETNAM*

Summary

New roads are being constructed and existing roads improved in the Lai Chau and Lao Cai areas of northwest North Vietnam within 50 miles of the border with Communist China. Completion of the present road work -- which is being carried out with the aid of the Chinese -- will, among other things, give the Chinese improved access to North Vietnam via two roads, access to contingency storage facilities, and the use of a secure telecommunications system.

25X1 More than 2,300 buildings have been identified along these roads as of March 1967 -- a significant increase over the 500 observed in the same general area [REDACTED] The buildings are located at 120 separate sites which are probably construction camps, military sites, or storage sites. Some of the buildings are apparently used to support the road construction. Others could be part of a forward logistic supply network for use by the Chinese Communists or part of a North Vietnamese dispersal system in the sanctuary zone along the border with China. Inasmuch as North Vietnamese leaders have encouraged resettlement in the northwest as part of the overall economic development of the country, it is possible that buildings grouped in larger clusters could also be new North Vietnamese villages.

* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Research and Reports; the estimates and conclusions represent the best judgment of the Directorate of Intelligence as of March 1967.

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A. Road Construction1. Background

The northwest area of North Vietnam remained underdeveloped after the end of the French-Indochinese war. Until the last few years, the road network there has been primitive even by Vietnamese standards and has served primarily local needs. Starting in 1963, however, the Chinese upgraded the road from Ko Chiu leading south to the North Vietnam border at Ban Nam Coum. This road now provides an improved connection from Yunnan Province, China, to Route 6 in North Vietnam, which extends south through Lai Chau and then east to Hanoi. The road connecting Kun-ming in China with Lao Cai in North Vietnam via Meng-tzu fell into disuse after the French-Indochinese war, but the Chinese began reconstructing it in 1965 and probably completed the work by late 1966. The wet climate and mountainous terrain in the border area require that the roads on both sides of the border be maintained annually if they are to be motorable the year round.

2. Road Construction, 1964 to the Present

Improvements to existing roads in northwest North Vietnam began in early 1964. Altogether, some 270 miles of road are being constructed or improved from the border crossings at Ban Nam Coum and Lao Cai to Dien Bien Phu and Yen Bai. About 70 percent of the work was complete by the end of 1966, with most of the remainder in mid to late stages of construction (see the table). Improvements to a segment of Route 6 between Ban Nam Coum and Lai Chau were completed

25X1 [] A road connecting Lao Cai and Ban Nam Coum using parts of Routes 4 and 132 was essentially complete by the end of 1966. The improvements consisted mainly of widening the 12-foot roadbeds to 18 feet, removing sharp curves and switchbacks, building new bridges, improving surface drainage, and surfacing the road with gravel. (see the map).

25X1 New road construction was observed south of Lai Chau [] which upon completion, will provide a more direct route from Lai Chau to Dien Bien Phu. The new road, designated Route 191, was about 30 percent complete []

25X1 [] Aerial photography [] revealed road

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construction on Route 132 southeast of Lao Cai proceeding towards Son La Province. Like Route 191, Route 132 is presently in early to mid stages of construction. The southernmost section of Route 159, which will provide an improved and more direct road from Lao Cai to Yen Bai, is in the late stages of construction.

At present rates of construction, the improvements to the road system now under way in the northwest will probably be completed by the end of 1967. These improvements will be of mutual advantage to the North Vietnamese and the Chinese. The former want to develop this region, and the Chinese will have better roads available in the event that a future contingency requires the use of Chinese troops in southeast Asia. The moderate pace of construction in the northwest suggests, however, a program of gradual improvement rather than a crash effort. Work on the roads is labor-intensive, and probably 10,000 workers will be required to complete the 80 miles of road still under construction.

B. New Facilities in the Northwest

1. Number and Characteristics

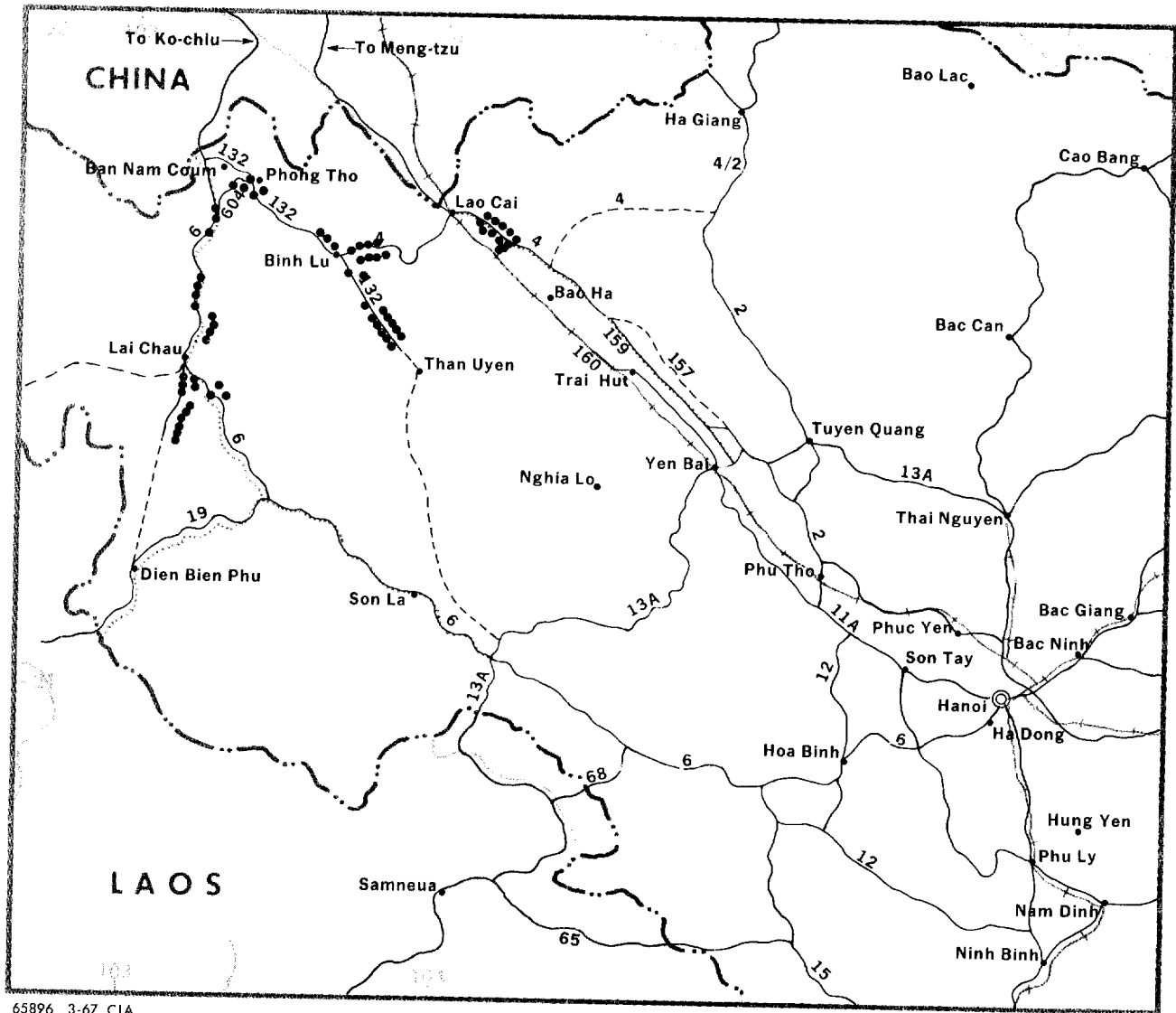
Aerial photography [] identified six construction camps on Route 4 southwest of Lao Cai, which contained 23 buildings identified as workers' quarters as well as numerous support buildings. [] more than 500 buildings were identified as probable construction camps, military sites, or storage sites in the Lai Chau and Phong Tho areas. Better quality photography [] showed 440 more buildings in the two areas. Photography of the Binh Lu and Lao Cai areas from [] identified an additional 1,370 buildings. The buildings, which now total more than 2,300, are dispersed in 120 different sites ranging in size from 1 to 90 buildings. All are located in the general area of the road construction observed since early 1964, and most of the sites have direct access to the roads. None of the military or storage sites in the Lai Chau area were evident in photographs [] and the sites on Route 132 southeast of Lao Cai have sprung up []

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All the buildings and sites have the following common characteristics: (1) They are located in northwest North

Construction Activity in Northwest North Vietnam



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- Road
- Telephone line
- Railroad
- Trail
- New probable construction camps and military camps or storage sites

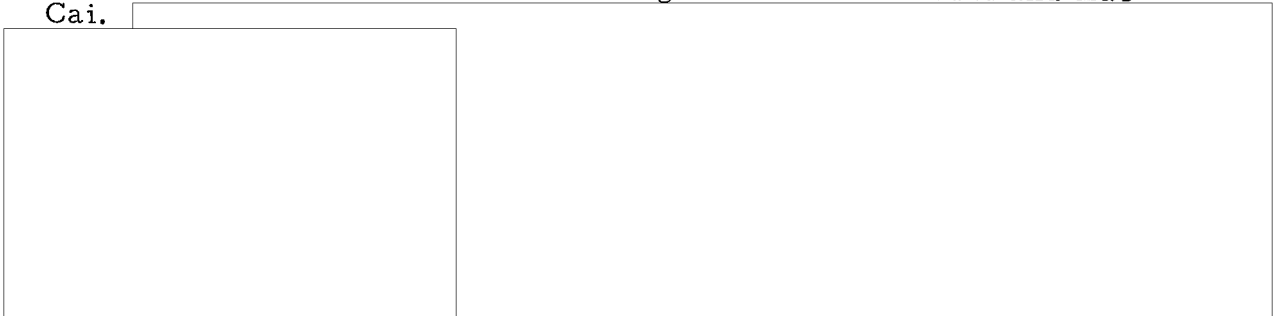
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Vietnam near the Chinese border on roads which have recently been improved or which are still under construction. (2) The buildings at each site are dispersed in a random manner. (3) The majority of the sites are within the 30-mile sanctuary zone declared by the United States when the bombing of North Vietnam began. (4) A telecommunications line extends from China through all the sites located on Routes 6 and 4. (5) Although the road construction is labor-intensive, there appear to be more buildings than would be necessary to house and support the construction crews.

2. Probable Purpose

Detailed photographic analysis has identified the sites as probable construction camps, military sites, or storage sites, but their exact function and who controls them are not known. Construction and improvements to the roads in northwest North Vietnam are apparently being carried out with the aid of the Chinese. The road work in all cases has progressed from China south into North Vietnam by way of the border crossings at Ban Nam Coum and Lao Cai.



Reliance on Chinese aid to build and improve roads in northwest North Vietnam does not mean, however, that the military and storage sites are controlled by the Chinese. Storage capacity at the newly identified sites is estimated to be 35,000 tons,* and the Chinese have more than 500,000 tons of storage capacity at supply depots located in Yunnan Province within 150 miles of the North Vietnam border. The North Vietnamese, on the other hand, may have constructed storage areas in the sanctuary zone to disperse goods and incoming supplies away from areas being bombed. North Vietnamese leaders have announced that a dispersal program is in progress to diminish the effects of airstrikes on the nation's resources.

Implementation of the program to resettle people from the delta to the northwest region could also account for some of the new

* Tonnages are given in short tons.

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facilities. The government has moved some villages from areas southeast of Hanoi to new settlements in Son La and Lai Chau Provinces. Information acquired in February 1966 revealed that two villages containing 39 dwellings and 187 inhabitants were moved from Thai Binh Province on the Gulf of Tonkin to Binh Lu in the Phong Tho District, Lai Chau Province. This move was to the same general area where road construction and new buildings were seen on Route 132. The announced purpose of moving villages to the northwest is for land reclamation and agriculture. In April 1966, Nhan Dan reported the completion of repairs to 114 medium-size and small water conservancy projects by residents in the Phong Tho District.

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